

VIETNAMESE AFFAIRS STAFF

OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE

DATE: 18 April 1973

TO: Mr. Richard T. Kennedy
National Security Council Staff

FROM:

SUBJECT: Background Note on the PRG

REMARKS:

Attached is a memorandum entitled "The Provisional Revolutionary Government of the Republic of South Vietnam," prepared by my associate [REDACTED]. This memo was written in response to a request from Bill Stearman. It constitutes an unclassified primer on the Provisional Revolutionary Government's antecedents designed to knock down, in non-polemical fashion, the PRG's pretensions to status and legitimacy as a bona fide government. I hope you and your associates find it of some interest and utility.

/s/

George A. Carver, Jr.
Special Assistant for Vietnamese Affairs

Attachment

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"The Provisional Revolutionary Government of the
Republic of South Vietnam"

"It may seem that . . . the establishment of the Provisional Revolutionary Government is more a matter of words than reality."
The Vietnamese Communist writer who penned these words in an article applauding the establishment of the Provisional Revolutionary Government (PRG) in June 1969 could not have described the PRG any more accurately. For in essence, the PRG, like the NLF which it superseded, is not an independent, popularly organized, responsive and functioning entity. Rather, it is a cosmetic organization possessing very limited, if any, authority, and is firmly under the control of the Lao Dong Party (i.e. Hanoi) and its southern apparatus. The PRG represents the latest and most pretentious front organization in a long string of fronts which the Lao Dong Party, formerly the Indochinese Communist Party, has proclaimed since the Party's establishment in 1930. The Communist propaganda claims that the PRG is an on-going government regulating all the internal and foreign affairs of the Viet Cong and is the sole representative of the South Vietnamese people are at variance with the actual situation.

Who Elected the PRG?

Nobody elected the PRG into office and its claims of representation have never been tested in an election. The PRG was established at the flick of the wrist at a June 1969 Communist-organized meeting of several dozen participants. The official announcement over the PRG/NLF clandestine "Liberation" Radio station, which itself broadcasts from a studio located in the suburbs of Hanoi, said:

"In an atmosphere of great enthusiasm over the great and comprehensive victories of our people on all battle-fields, on 6, 7, and 8 June a congress of national delegates of South Vietnam was held in a locality in the liberated areas to review the situation of the anti-U. S. national salvation resistance struggle of our people and to appoint a Provisional Revolutionary Government and an Advisory Council to the government."

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There were 88 delegates present at the congress, the majority of whom were veteran participants in the National Liberation Front (NLF), the national united front established under Party tutelage in 1960 to spearhead the overt effort to overthrow the South Vietnamese government. Another bloc of delegates participating in the congress were members of the so-called Vietnam Alliance of National, Democratic and Peace Forces, another front group which was established in the midst of the 1968 Tet offensive in an effort to appeal to bourgeois-intellectual elements in South Vietnam. The controlling hand of the Party was also publicly evident at the congress of front men with the presence there of an individual named Nguyen Van Linh, the deputy general secretary of the Central Committee of the People's Revolutionary Party, which is the southern branch of the Lao Dong Party. In addition, the Liberation Radio assertion that the congress was held in a liberated area is somewhat misleading. More accurately, the congress was held in the base camp of the southern Party headquarters, which was then and remains still located in Cambodia. The whereabouts of the PRG's seat or "capital" is not difficult to determine. Its "capital" actually consists of a meeting hall located within the Party headquarters complex.

The question of why the PRG was established in June 1969 is open to interpretation. Suffice it to say that the Communists felt that the PRG's time had come. June 1969 was deemed a propitious time when maximum diplomatic advantage could be garnered in the form of recognitions and acceptability. It is to be recalled that the international conference of Communist and workers parties was being held in Moscow at the time of the announcement of the PRG's establishment, and with this development in mind the Vietnamese Communists may have decided to coincide the PRG's establishment with the Moscow meeting. The sovereign Soviet-oriented Communist parties represented at the Moscow meeting very quickly recognized the PRG. Moreover, the Communists might have felt that within the context of the semi-public, four-party Paris talks, a forum used to enhance the image of the southern front organization, the time had likewise come for the NLF delegation's status to be upgraded on a par with the other three governmental participants. Thus, the NLF delegation to the Paris talks on 10 June 1969 becomes the delegation of the PRG on 11 June 1969.

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PRG Personalities

At the time of its establishment the PRG consisted of 38 individuals who comprised the cabinet and advisory council of the self-proclaimed government. The majority of these 38 individuals have been associated with either the NLF or the Vietnam Alliance and have recorded a long service of doing the Communists' bidding on the public stage while the Party exercised the real authority in the background.

The president of the PRG is Huynh Tan Phat, who prior to becoming PRG president was Secretary General of the NLF Central Committee Secretariat. Although he is officially listed as a member of the "Democratic Party", a defunct party that was affiliated with the Viet Minh front during the 1940's, there are reports that Phat is actually a member of the Lao Dong Party.

Another leader in the PRG is its defense minister, Tran Nam Trung, who also has been publicly identified as holding the positions of Vice Chairman of the NLF Central Committee Presidium, Chairman of the NLF Central Committee's Military Committee, and member of the People's Revolutionary Party. The case of Tran Nam Trung illustrates one of the most striking examples of the Lao Dong Party's clandestine and diversionary methods. Tran Nam Trung is a job title which the Communists have developed into an individual. Tran Nam Trung, as such, does not exist as an individual. At least two and maybe three North Vietnamese Army (NVA) generals have been Tran Nam Trung since the early 1960's. The official photograph of Tran Nam Trung released by the Communists has been identified as that of NVA General Tran Luong, a member of the Lao Dong Party Central Committee, who has been the current Tran Nam Trung for several years now.

The background of General Tran Van Tra, the chief of the PRG delegation to the Two Party Joint Military Commission, is another clear example of the PRG's lack of independence and substance. Tran Van Tra ostensibly a PRG official is actually an overt alternate member of the Lao Dong Party Central Committee. During the French war he served as a zonal commander in a region of South Vietnam, under the overall leadership of Lao Dong Party First Secretary Le Duan who was then Party secretary in the South. Upon his regroupment to North Vietnam after the 1954 settlement, Tran Van Tra was named deputy chief of staff of the NVA and

later was appointed a member of North Vietnam's most senior military command authority, the Central Committee's Military Party Committee. Tra dropped out of sight in 1963-64, came southward and was attached to the southern Party command. His chief alias in South Vietnam has been "Tu Chi." A photo of General Tra seen together with the late NVA senior general Nguyen Chi Thanh, Political Bureau member of the Lao Dong Party who from 1964-67 was COSVN secretary, was captured in early 1967 and released to the public at the time. It was indeed surprising when Tra surfaced publicly as the PRG chief to the Joint Military Commissions since his background constitutes prima facie evidence of the Party's control over the PRG. Tra can be considered about as truly "independent southern PRG" as the leader of the Lao Dong Party, First Secretary Le Duan, whose background is somewhat similar to Tra's. On the basis of Tra's experience, the Lao Dong leader himself may even qualify and become a PRG official.

Party Control

The real locus of power and authority in the southern Communist organization is in the Central Office of South Vietnam (COSVN), which is identical to the Central Committee of the People's Revolutionary Party (PRP), the name given to the southern branch of the Lao Dong Party.

A word about COSVN is necessary to help put this organization and the PRG in their proper contexts. The Central Office of South Vietnam was re-established by the Party Central Committee in 1961 to lead Party activities in the South. The Central Office had previously been operating during the Franco-Viet Minh conflict; it was dissolved in the mid-1950's after the signing of the Geneva agreements in 1954 and was replaced by a Regional Party Committee -- the Nam Bo (literally meaning "southern part") Regional Party Committee. The organizational charter of COSVN is openly spelled out in the statutes of the Lao Dong Party which stipulate that the "Central Committee can select a number of Central Committee members to establish Central Offices to direct Party activities of particularly important Party units. The Central Office is placed under the leadership of the Central Committee."

The Central Office therefore functions as the Party Central Committee's bureau for the southern area and is staffed with a complement

of Central Committee members. In its internal organization the Central Office is a mirror image of the Party Central Committee's organization. For example, the Standing Committee of the Central Office functions as a Political Bureau, and the Regional Military Party Committee in the South functions as a forward extension of the Central Military Party Committee, the senior military authority at the Hanoi level.

To hide the Lao Dong's controlling hand, an ostensibly separate Communist party was overtly established in December 1961 and became affiliated as one of three political parties in NLF. The PRP in fact is the southern branch of the Lao Dong Party and the PRP's Central Committee is synonymous with COSVN.

It is the staff of the Central Office or the PRP Central Committee, not the publicly proclaimed leaders of the Provisional Revolutionary Government, who direct and control the Viet Cong, under the overall leadership of the Lao Dong headquarters in Hanoi. The Central Office is subdivided into a variety of political, military, economic agencies (a Standing Committee, a Military Party Committee, logistics, rear service, finance, front, foreign affairs, governmental organs, etc.) which provide the necessary backbone and support for the Viet Cong.

The PRG does not perform these above functions and exists solely on paper, over the airwaves of Vietnamese Communist media and is periodically trotted out for ceremonial occasions. Copying the forms of a government, the PRG does possess a full cabinet of ministers, has a council of ministers, accepts diplomatic recognition and appoints officials identified as PRG diplomats to overseas posts. The reality of the situation is, however, that within the Viet Cong movement and organization, it is not the PRG but the Party which makes policy and issues action directives/resolutions from the regional down to the hamlet levels.

Dictionaries define a government as "the organization, machinery, or agency through which a political unit exercises authority and performs functions" or as "the body of persons that constitutes the governing authority of a political unit or organization." The PRG does not fit these definitions, whereas the Lao Dong Party and leaders do. Indeed several public statements by Vietnamese Communist officials made over the years leave no doubt as to who runs things in South Vietnam.

Lao Dong Party Political Bureau member Truong Chinh reportedly said in October 1967 with regard to the NLF and the Party:

"All the Vietnamese people are strongly united and firmly organized into national united fronts -- the Fatherland Front in North Vietnam and the NLFSV in South Vietnam. These two fronts are based upon the alliance of the workers and peasants and are led by the party of Marxism-Leninism."

And an identified official of the People's Revolutionary Party whose remarks were belatedly broadcast over the PRG/NLF radio station on 1 February 1970 was as revealing when he said:

"Dear comrades, the success of the South Vietnam revolution has been the success of the Party's correct line under the clear-sighted leadership of the Party Central Committee headed by Chairman Ho."